OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

POLITICAL CONDUCT

OF THE

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS;

INCLUDING

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THEIR HISTORY, FROM THE TIME OF QUEEN ELIZABETH;

IN FIVE LETTERS TO A FRIEND,

BY THE

REV. DAVID RIVERS,
Late Preacher to a Congregation of Diſſenters at Highgate.

There is a ſtiff-neck'd, harden'd crew,
That give not Cæſar, no nor God, his due;
Reprobate Traitors, Tyrants of their own,
Yet grudge to ſee their Monarch on his Throne.

NAT. LEE.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY T. BURTON, GATE-STREET, LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS;

AND SOLD BY

MESSRS. RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD; E. BOOKER, NEW BOND STREET; HARDING, ST JAMES'S STREET; AND MR. STEWART, PICCADILLY.

(Price One Shilling.)

BRITISH MUSEUM

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

LETTER I.

Retroſpective View of the Hiſtory of the Diſſenters.

DEAR SIR,

THE very extraordinary political conduct of the Proteſtant Diſſenters, during the whole of the reign of His preſent Majeſty (but more eſpecially *of late years*); their avowed attachment to *thoſe Men* whoſe principles and conduct were openly inimical to Government; their bold attempts to ſhake off thoſe reſtraints which the wiſdom of the Legiſlature had in former times impoſed; and their unnatural coalition with *Catholics*, to anſwer their own ſiniſter and dangerous deſigns againſt the Conſtitution; has been a ſubject of aſtoniſhment to ſome perſons: but, as I have frequently obſerved in converſation with you, it has not in any degree excited my wonder. No, Sir. As *a collective body of men* (for there are ſome truly loyal and excellent individuals among them) the Proteſtant Diſſenters ever have been aiming, to adopt Dr. Prieſtley's elegant term, "to undermine and blow up the Conſtitution." In the ſeries of

Letters I ſhall have the honour to addreſs to you, I preſume I ſhall be able fully to prove what I have aſſerted. Having been brought up, educated, and, occaſionally, preached among them, I have for a ſeries of years made it a point to ſtudy their political character and bias; and have had thoſe opportunities which a ſtranger could not poſſibly have had. — Believe me, it is not from any rancour, or in conſequence of any incivilities I have received from them as a body, that occaſions me to take up my pen; — I am impelled and conſtrained thus to act, from the exiſting circumſtances of the times, and from a ſenſe of my duty as a loyal ſubject. I wiſh none of the privileges which the Diſſenters are *juſtly* permitted to enjoy, for *conſcience' ſake*, to be retrenched or abridged; they have a right to worſhip God in that mode they conceive moſt analogous to Scripture and to reaſon; but they have no right to *dabble in politics*. They have no right to neglect praying for the King; they have no right to ſtir up the flames of ſedition, and to become the firebrands of the State; — they have no right to propagate French Principles, or to become *United Iriſhmen*. — Such, however, has been their conduct. But previous to my entering upon a review of their recent behaviour, I ſhall, agreeably to your requeſt, preſent you with a ſhort analyſis of their Hiſtory, from the time of their firſt appearing in this country, under the name of Puritans, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

When

When our venerable Reformers firſt began that important work of renovating the Engliſh Church, and clearing it of the rubbiſh and ſuperſtition of Popery, every ſtep they took was guided by the moſt profound wiſdom and ſagacity. Aware of the prejudices of the human mind, of the bias ariſing from education, and the force of cuſtom, they proceeded gradually in the glorious work of Reformation, and were extremely anxious to preſerve every thing of *little importance* in the old religion, while they expunged from their creed every doctrine, and from their formula every ritual, that was oppoſite or not conformable to the Holy Scriptures. With reſpect to canonical habits and veſtments, and various ceremonies, ſuch as bowing at the name of Jeſus, making the ſign of the croſs in baptiſm, and the obſervance of feaſts and feſtivals, they made ſuch retrenchments and alterations only as were eſſentially neceſſary. The moderation, the candour, and the wiſdom, of thoſe great and illuſtrious men, cannot ſufficiently be admired.

While the Reformers were thus employed in eradicating Popery, the ſeeds of diſcontent and of envy began to appear among ſome of the Reformed; who, as if they wiſhed to ſtrangle the Reformation *in its cradle*, raiſed objections againſt the meaſures that had been purſued; inſiſted that every fragment, veſtige, and rag, of the "Old Whore of Babylon" (as they termed the Church of

Rome) ſhould be caſt off, and that the Reformation ſhould be carried much farther than it had been.—In the reign of King Edward VI. a difference had ariſen between Dr. Hooper, Biſhop of Glouceſter, and Dr. Ridley, of London, reſpecting the Epiſcopal veſtments. Hooper refuſed to wear them; and Dr. Ridley, equally ſenſible of the fallacy of the objections raiſed againſt them, would not conſecrate Hooper: at length the latter complied, and became an illuſtrious ornament of the Church, for he died, in the ſucceeding reign, a martyr in ſupport of the Proteſtant Religion. But the firſt ſeeds of that wretched ſchiſm from the Engliſh Reformed Church, that has been attended with ſuch evil conſequences, were ſown at Geneva, by Calvin, among thoſe who fled thither to find an aſylum from the bloody perſecution raiſed againſt the Proteſtants by Queen Mary. This ſour and moroſe Reformer "was unqueſtionably in theory a Republican; * his ideas were peculiarly narrow and illiberal. He was a rigid enemy to thoſe decent rites and ceremonies which the Engliſh Church had retained; he wiſhed to ſtrip religion of all its trappings, and was an advocate for a *purer* mode of worſhip. Theſe novel and Utopian ideas were eagerly imbibed by many of the Engliſh Exiles; who, on their arriving in England

* See the maſterly obſervations on the political principles of Calvin, by that eminently learned Prelate Dr. Horſley, Biſhop of Rocheſter, annexed to his eloquent Sermon before the Houſe of Peers, January 30, 1793.

upon

upon the acceſſion of Queen Elizabeth to the throne, formed themſelves into a party, and ſeceded from the Mother Church. They were ſtiled "Puritans," from their affecting a more *pure* mode of faith than others. "The prudential meaſures Queen Eliza-"beth adopted, to recover the reformation of reli-"gion (ſays Biſhop Burnet) might have been ex-"pected to have *united* the Church; but this, by "the paſſions of ſome, the intereſts of others, "and the weakneſs of the greateſt part, was de-"nied us." *

During the whole of the reign of this illuſtrious Princeſs, the Puritans were obſtinately factious, and frequently plotted againſt the Queen's life. Hacket, Coppenger, and ſeveral other of theſe ſectariſts were executed for ſeditious practices. Archbiſhops Parker and Whitgift were aſſiduous in ſtopping the progreſs of fanaticiſm; and by the decrees of the ſtar-chamber, many were fined and thrown into priſon. Mr. Neale † has much exaggerated their caſes, which, if, perhaps, in ſome inſtances, too rigorous, were juſtified by the critical circumſtances of the times, and the behaviour of the puritanical party.

What muſt have been the conſequence had they been ſuffered to carry on their practices, and openly vilify the Queen and hierarchy, may eaſily be gueſſed

* Burnet's Hiſtory of the Reformation, vol. ii. p. 407.

† Neal's Hiſtory of the Puritans, vol. i.

by

by their ſubſequent conduct in a future reign. Their ungenerous endeavours to weaken and diſtract the government during the Queen's reign, was evidenced by their ready alliance with any diſappointed nobleman, who wiſhed to form a faction againſt the court. Thus, when the proud Earl of Leiceſter, and the turbulent Earl of Eſſex, were baniſhed from the court, they found *zealous partiſans* among the Puritans, and conſequently put themſelves at their head. —But, Sir, if you wiſh for a portrait of a deſperate puritanical reformer, contemplate the character, and read the biography of John Knox. He it was, who blew the trumpet of ſedition againſt the unfortunate and beautiful Queen of Scots—who publiſhed "The Firſt Blaſt of the Trumpet againſt the Monſtrous Regiment of Women,"—who, after delivering an exhortation to the Queen, jocoſely ſaid, "I made the Hyæna weep." *

When the ſon of this unfortunate princeſs aſcended the Engliſh throne, the Puritans entertained the higheſt hopes of favour and patronage; but James had ſeen too much of fanaticiſm in Scotland for to encourage its growth in his newly acquired dominions. To give them an opportunity of pleading their own cauſe, he appointed a conference to be held at Hampton Court, between an equal number of divines of the Eſtabliſhment and of the Puritans,—the ſequel was, as might be expected, a deadly blow to

* See Seward's Anecdotes, vol. i.

the

the cauſe of the latter. Archbiſhop Whitgift had previouſly echoed to the king, " no biſhop, no king". James knew the enmity of the Puritans to the Epiſcopal Bench, and wiſely profited by the hint. James ever after diſcovered his averſion to the Puritans, and to ſhew his contempt for their pretended ſanctity, he ordered the Book of Sports to be read in churches, a meaſure equally weak as it was totally indefenſible.—Encouraged by the mildneſs and lenity of Archbiſhop Abbot, they began to become turbulent, when the death of James, and the acceſſion of Charles I. gave another damp to their proſpects.—Charles was more diſguſted with the Puritans than his father, and the elevation of Laud to the archiepiſcopal ſee of Canterbury, who was their avowed enemy, gave occaſion for the exerciſing ſome ſeverities which were undoubtedly inconſiſtent with the true and genuine ſpirit of the Proteſtant Religion.

Much provocation was given by the Puritan writers, who, by vulgar invectives and ſcurrilous libels againſt the court and the biſhops, excited juſt indignation. William Prynne, a barriſter of Lincoln's Inn, was convicted of writing one of theſe libels, and ſentenced to pay 5000l. to ſtand in the pillory, to have his ears cut off, and be baniſhed the country. Dr. Baſtwick, a phyſician, and Mr. Burton, a diſſenting teacher, had ſimilar ſentences paſſed upon them. Theſe proceedings alarmed the Puritans, and mul-

multitudes of them ſought an aſylum in New England, and there founded Engliſh colonies.

When the long parliament met, November 3, 1640, the ills of the nation were redreſſed; but the Puritans ſmarting under the laſh, exerted their utmoſt efforts to ſtir up the people againſt the court, the biſhops, and the king. Their reſentment was not allayed by the execution of the Earl of Strafford and Archbiſhop Laud, their principal adverſaries; but they ceaſed not caballing until the ſtandard of rebellion was hoiſted againſt their ſovereign: and he was deprived both of his crown and his life.

The Diſſenters were not ſo loſt to ſhame as not to be ſenſible of the everlaſting odium with which poſterity would hereafter look upon them, as the perpetrators of this black deed. Theſe ſeceders from the Church had ſchiſms among themſelves, and divided into innumerable parties, each of which poſſeſſed the moſt inplacable hatred for the other. Anabaptiſts, Sabbatarians, Millenarians, Fifth Monarchy Men, and many other ſects equally heterogeneous and chimerical in their notions, had their riſe among the Puritans.

The two principal parties among them were the Preſbyterians and the Independants: you recollect the ſtory of Dr. Radcliffe and his man bandying the Haſty-pudding about, and throwing ſpoonfuls of it

at

at each other; ſuch was the conduct of the Puritans, each party was willing to avoid the imputation of cutting the King's head off, and throwing the guilt of it upon the other; it is of little conſequence what denomination of the Puritans occaſioned this melancholy event. The fact is certain, that to the Puritans alone, was this tragical event owing. It was their vile fanaticiſm that inebriated the minds of men, and ſet them againſt Epiſcopacy, cauſed them to aboliſh the upper Houſe of Parliament, to behead their Sovereign, and bring in a compleat levelling ſyſtem! Was not the Parliament compoſed of the loweſt dregs of the nation, the ſcum of ſociety,—draymen, butchers, coal-heavers, tinkers, coblers, and tub-preachers, all under the guidance and direction of the ambitious but penetrating Cromwell, who made Puritaniſm the ladder by which he aſcended to the higheſt ſummit of dignity? It matters not what was the *popular denomination* of Diſſenters at that time. If it had not been for the Puritans, Charles would never have been beheaded, and *Cromwell* would have remained in the ſituation he originally was, that of a private gentleman. His uſurpation of the reins of Government was entirely owing to the *Puritans:* for, by adroitly adopting their blaſphemous cant, he eaſily acquired that ſuperiority which his ſingular talents improved to anſwer his own private ends and ſiniſter deſigns

But, Sir, let us now take a ſurvey of the behaviour of thoſe men, when armed with power, thoſe meek and pious ſaints, who were for ever "ſeeking the Lord." And by conſulting the annals of that time, you will find nothing but *intolerance* practiſed by thoſe very men who had ſo loudly exclaimed againſt it. Surely that was a time when ſome of the "fruits of the goſpel" might have been expected to have been evidenced by men who acknowledged no King but *King Jeſus*, and who arrogated to themſelves the title of choſen of the Lord. Not content with hurling the biſhops from their ſeats of eminence, deſtroying every veſtige of epiſcopacy, demoliſhing the firſt reliques of antiquity, and violating the ſacred aſhes of the dead, they perſecuted the clergy of the eſtabliſhment with vigour and unparalled cruelty. The moſt eminent piety, or the greateſt talents, could not ſcreen its poſſeſſor, if a miniſter of the Church of England, from their ruthleſs barbarity*. The venerable Biſhop Hall was not only deprived of all his church preferments, but his library and houſehold goods were ſeized and put up to ſale. Speaking of theſe villainous tranſactions, the aged and pious prelate thus expreſſes himſelf: "The ſequeſtrators ſent certain men to appraiſe all the goods that were in my houſe, which they accordingly executed with all diligent ſeverity, not leaving me ſo much as a dozen of trenchers, or

* See Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy.

my

my child's pictures out of my curious inventory; yea, they would have appraiſed our very wearing apparel, had not ſome of them declared their opinion to the contrary". Surely theſe holy marauders were types of the modern French.

Nor was it to the clergy they limited their infamous extortions and peculations, every loyaliſt had his eſtate ſequeſtered. Theſe were the glorious times when diſſenters held the reins of power. Thank God, it was only for a ſhort period! Such was the ſituation, the diſaſtrous ſituation of this country when Oliver Cromwell * was Protector; Owen, Vice Chancellor of Oxford, Goodwin, Preſident of Magdalen Hall; Praiſe God Barebones, Speaker of the Houſe of Commons; and when the members of the ſenate, and in fact, all perſons in power, affixed long ſcripture ſentences to their names. I have ſeen a liſt of the grand jury for the county of Suſſex at that period, where, among other curious names, I noticed the two following: "Kill Sin Pimple", and "Stand Faſt in the Faith Stringer". Books with ſuch titles as the following were then publiſhed: "Heaven taken by Storm", "Crumbs of Comfort for the Chickens of the Covenant", "A Whip and Spur for a heavy A——d Chriſtian" "A gentle Shove for a Believer's Crupper".

* This is not deſigned to apply to Oliver Cromwell's political conduct when at the head of affairs.

I have ſaid ſufficient to convince you of the blaſphemous enthuſiaſm ſo generally prevalent during the Commonwealth. The nation groaned under this intolerable burden for a few years; but, after the death of Cromwell, and the reſignation of his ſon Richard—Broils and cabals between the republicans ſucceeded, until, by the dexterous policy of General Monk, the glorious Reſtoration of King Charles the Second took place. A preliminary treaty had been entered upon at Breda, in which the King had made ſome conceſſions with regard to the Toleration of Diſſenters.

Monarchy being again eſtabliſhed, and with it the Hierarchy of the Church, the King, unlike the perſons who had lately been in power, acted in the moſt gentle and lenient manner to the Diſſenters. A conference was appointed at the Savoy, in which twelve of the Biſhops and twelve Preſbyterian Divines aſſiſted: the purport was to conſider of a reviſion of the Liturgy, ſo as to render it palatable to the Diſſenters. Mr. Baxter produced a Liturgy of his own, which ſeemed to ſuit the temper of neither party; in fine, the Preſbyterians were ſo little inclined to relax from their old prejudices, that the conceſſions of the Epiſcopal Party proved of no avail, and the conference ended as it had began.

Overtures were made, and even the mitre offered to the principal miniſters among them, if they would

enter within the pale of the Church. Two of their Divines accepted theſe gracious offers; Dr. Reynolds, who was made Biſhop of Norwich, and Dr. Wilkins, who was promoted to the ſee of Cheſter.

But while not only the olive-branch was held out, but even lucrative offers made, to thoſe very men who had overturned the Conſtitution and ſubverted the Government, it would have been rank injuſtice to have ſuffered the clergy to be baniſhed from their livings, and tamely permit the Church emoluments to be enjoyed by men who were ſworn enemies to it. To remedy this evil, and to diſcriminate between the Epiſcopalian and Non-conformiſt divines, then in poſſeſſion of livings, the celebrated act of Uniformity was paſſed (1662) which occaſioned two thouſand miniſters to reſign their preferments.

The Diſſenters have never ceaſed to pourtray, in the blackeſt colours, this act of juſtice to the Engliſh clergy. What right had theſe Diſſenters to thoſe livings? — were they not obtained when the Church was deſtroyed, and Epiſcopacy aboliſhed? Did not the Incumbents, who had been legally inducted, have their livings forcibly taken from them? Where, then, was the hardſhip, where the cruelty, where the oppreſſion, for thoſe men either to conform to that Church into which they had intruded themſelves, or elſe to reſign them to thoſe who were Conformiſts? Neither can I ſee much magnanimity,

nanimity, nor ſuffering for " righteouſneſs' ſake," in the reſignation theſe divines made of eccleſiaſtical preferments unjuſtly obtained. Could they ever have had the madneſs to ſuppoſe, that, after the re-eſtabliſhment of Epiſcopacy, they would be ſuffered to remain in the Church Non-conformiſts? Dr. Calamy thought proper to preſerve memorials of theſe two thouſand ejected miniſters, to repreſent them in the light of martyrs and confeſſors.

The frequent cabals of the Diſſenters againſt Government, during the reſt of this Monarch's reign, expoſed them to thoſe inconveniences which, by a quiet, peaceable, and humble deportment, they would have been exempted from. The clergy had been conſiderable ſufferers in their perſons, their property, and eſtates; it could not be expected they could look with the moſt friendly eye upon the men who had been rioting amidſt the ſpoils of the Church. Penal laws againſt conventicles were made, and the Five Mile, the Corporation, and Teſt Acts, paſſed; which latter totally incapacitated any Diſſenter from filling places of truſt and importance under Government. This act has long been a ſore grievance to them; but I ſhall reſerve what I have to ſay upon it to a future letter.

James II. more effectually to anſwer his deſign of bringing in Popery, granted ſingular indulgences to the Diſſenters; and ſo charmed were they with this complaiſance

complaiſance of the Monarch, that they preſented to him the moſt flattering addreſſes of attachment to his Perſon and Government: and while they railed againſt Epiſcopacy, they could with pleaſure ſee Popery making rapid ſtrides to overwhelm the Kingdom. Shame at length operated upon them, and induced them to join with the clergy, in inviting over William Prince of Orange, to reſcue this land from Popery, Tyranny, and Slavery.

King William being a Calviniſt, the Diſſenters had great hopes of extraordinary indulgence from him; and great pains did that Monarch take, to remove their grounds of oppoſition to the Church: but, ſplenetic and obſtinate, they reſiſted every effort for a comprehenſion.

During the reign of Queen Anne, more eſpecially towards the latter part of it, they became very obnoxious, and vented their rage againſt the High Church party in abuſive invectives. Daniel de Foe ſignalized himſelf as a warm advocate in their behalf; he publiſhed "The True-born Engliſhman," for which he was ſentenced to the Pillory. De Foe was a Diſſenter himſelf. During the trial of Dr. Sacheverel, the populace aſſembled in crowds, and gutted ſeveral of the Diſſenting Meeting Houſes.—Very ſtrong meaſures were taken by the Miniſtry to curb the turbulent ſpirit of the Diſſenters; in particular, an act paſſed to prevent the growth of ſchiſm:

ſchiſm: but the ſudden death of the Queen prevented this act from ever taking effect. The Diſſenters could not diſſemble their joy at the death of Queen Anne: their miniſters even pointed out the finger of God as eſpecially operating in their behalf.

Since the acceſſion of the illuſtrious Houſe of Hanover to the Throne of theſe Kingdoms, the Proteſtant Diſſenters have experienced the full enjoyment of unlimited toleration. But we find them, in the reigns of George I. and II. frequently joining men in oppoſition, and indulging the ſame ſpirit of virulence againſt the Church eſtabliſhment. Gordon, in his "Independent Whig," and Baron, in his "Pillars of Prieſtcraft Shaken," evidenced the true ſpirit of the ſect. Nor is it a circumſtance that much redounds to the honour of the Diſſenters, that the Earl of Kilmarnock (who was taken in open arms againſt his ſovereign, in the rebellion of 1745) was a Diſſenter, and during his impriſonment, and upon the ſcaffold on Tower-Hill, was attended by the moſt celebrated Diſſenting Divine of that period, Dr. Forſter of the Old Jewry, who publiſhed a pompous account of the behaviour of that nobleman at the place of execution.

I have thus, Sir; given your a very brief view of the conduct of the Diſſenters, from their firſt eſtabliſhment as a ſect. And I have little doubt but you

you will agree with me in asserting, that they always have shown a bitter hatred to the Church establishment (this has been their invariable characteristic) and have frequently proved dangerous subjects to the State; but in no period whatever, more so than since the accession of His present Majesty to the Throne.

I have the honour to be, &c.

LETTER II.

Review of the Conduct of the Diſſenters with reſpect to Mr. Wilkes; and the Revolt of the American Colonies.

DEAR SIR,

NO Monarch ever aſcended a throne with more eclat than His preſent Majeſty; and the firſt ſpeech he delivered, endeared him to his ſubjects in a moſt eſpecial manner. Never was there a proſpect of greater ſerenity in the political horizon than at that period. But the turbulent paſſions of evil men and ſeducers, early began to excite diſcontent, and to raiſe a ſpirit of diſaffection to Government.

The adminiſtration of the Earl of Bute was induſtriouſly calumniated by the party in oppoſition, and ſhoals of libels daily iſſued from the preſs. In theſe ebullitions of faction, you may reſt aſſured the Diſſenters had no little ſhare; but their moſt active exertions were reſerved, until the period when that mock patriot Mr. Wilkes firſt made his political debût.

The

The parents of Mr. Wilkes were Diſſenters; his father was a Preſbyterian, and attended a Diſſenting Meeting, where afterwards I preached for nearly two years. John was educated in all the democratical ſpirit of the ſect, and from that early taint we may attribute his ſubſequent virulent oppoſition to Government. After being the completeſt debauchee and rake, and publiſhing his infamous "Eſſay on Woman," he commenced the Hero of Liberty; under which ſpecious pretence he juggled the multitude, and made them entertain the higheſt ideas of his political integrity, while he was only *fiſhing for a place!*

Round the ſtandard of "Wilkes and Liberty" the Non-conformiſts flocked in crowds; they highly extolled the virtue and patriotiſm of the man who had blaſphemed the Chriſtian religion, and became warm, but very *weak*, partiſans of his cauſe. A Diſſenter and a *Wilkite* were ſynonimous terms.

This was their boaſted attachment to the Houſe of Hanover! this their gratitude for privileges unknown to, and unpoſſeſſed by their forefathers! Wilkes was the bubble of a day, and, after having amuſed the gaping crowd for a while, got his pockets well filled, capered off with a grin, and ſunk into that inſignificance from which he firſt emerged, after heartily laughing at the credulity of his admirers.

But, if the behaviour of the Diſſenters was highly indecent in interfering at all in politics, but eſpecially in joining the head of Oppoſition, their conduct upon the breaking out of the war with the American Colonies, was more flagitious and wicked. It is to be obſerved, that thoſe Colonies were principally compoſed of Diſſenters, the deſcendants of thoſe Puritans who had fled from this iſland in the reign of Charles the Firſt. This cannot, however, be conſidered as the leaſt palliation for the baſe conduct of the Engliſh Diſſenters, in warmly and openly eſpouſing the cauſe of men who were in arms againſt the Sovereign of the Britiſh Empire.

I ſhall not enter into any diſcuſſion of the policy or impolicy of the ſteps taken by thoſe who were then in power, to reduce the Colonies to obedience; the unfortunate iſſue you well know.

But were not the Diſſenters ſtrenuouſly active in ſerving the intereſt of the diſaffected Colonies at home? Was not the courage and vigour of the enemy much heightened by the repeated aſſurances they had of cordial aſſiſtance from their brethren on this ſide of the Atlantic? Did not the Diſſenters uſe their utmoſt endeavours to blacken the meaſures of Government, and to weaken and deſtroy the confidence of the nation in its rulers? and were not their endeavours crowned with too much ſucceſs? So much ſo, that I attribute the loſs of America to the Proteſtant

teſtant Diſſenters. Dr. Price, that firebrand of ſedition, did the moſt eſſential ſervice, by his inflammatory publications, to animate and invigorate the Colonies to perſevere in their revolt. His exertions were ſeconded by the whole phalanx of the Diſſenters, headed by the members of the ſenate in oppoſition to government; thus, powerfully ſupported by a rank and diſcontented party here, they carried on the conteſt till they gained their independence.

"Succeſs to the Americans," and "General Waſhington," were the ſtanding favourite toaſts among the Diſſenters. One of their miniſters (Dr. *Gordon*) went over to America, with the expreſs purpoſe of ſpiriting *up* the Colonies to rebellion. He was ſettled at Roxburgh, and I have now before me, one of his pulpit orations, delivered on a faſt day, to Congreſs.—This man, after the peace, had the effrontery to come back to England, and publiſh "The Hiſtory of the American War," in 4 vols. 8vo. profeſſedly written to miſrepreſent and give a falſe ſtatement of the occurrences of the war. You will naturally ſurmiſe, that the Doctor muſt have a tolerable ſhare of impudence; and from his account of ſome of the principal engagements, you may judge, "He was never whipped for lying."

I have the honour to be, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Repeal of the Corporation and Teſt Acts.

DEAR SIR,

AFTER the unparalleled behaviour of the Diſſenters, in joining the cauſe of America, you will be filled with juſt aſtoniſhment to find them applying for a repeal of thoſe important acts, which prevent their occupying places of truſt and importance. Some of the Arian and Unitarian Clergy, with the late Dr. John Jebb at their head, had held meetings at the Feathers Tavern, in the Strand, to ſolicit relief from "ſubſcribing to the Thirty-nine Articles;" in this application they were eagerly ſeconded by the Preſbyterian Miniſters, who were moſtly Arians and Socinians:—this application was unſucceſsful.

After the concluſion of the American war, the Diſſenters, *ſenſible* how much they merited the favors of Government by their late EXEMPLARY behaviour, applied in the year 1787, for a Repeal of the Corporation and Teſt Acts. But, previous to noticing the

effects of this application, it may be proper to make a few remarks on the excellency and expediency of thoſe acts.

" Every community", ſays an elegant and judicious writer, " has a right to impoſe ſuch limitations " and reſtraints on the privileges of individuals, as " are conducive to the public happineſs and welfare of the ſociety at large; to determine by what " qualifications the various ranks and orders of the " State ſhall be diſtinguiſhed, and what conditions " and qualities ſhall be required of thoſe who are " to perform the neceſſary functions of each. Re- " ſtraints of individuals, for public convenience, " do really increaſe the happineſs and liberty of the " community in general; the members of which, " by the ſupport of that conſtitution which ſecures " to them every thing valuable in ſociety, receive " more in addition to their civil liberty, than they " loſe by the diminution of thoſe private rights " and privileges which are ſubmitted to the public " direction. Civil incapacities and reſtraints im- " poſed by law, are not then neceſſarily evils; they " are not puniſhments; they are not perſecution; " but they are ſalutary proviſions, made without " ſuppoſition of any fault or tranſgreſſion of any " member of the community, for the more effectual " ſecurity of the benefits of civil union." *

* Dr. Thorpe's, Archdeacon of Northumberland, Sermon on " Eſtabliſhments in Religion."

A cele-

A celebrated Prelate, a warm friend to the Diſſenters, and an advocate for the repeal of thoſe acts, has aſſerted, "That civil incapacity brought upon "men by law, is an evil affecting their property "and their character; and that an excluſion from "civil offices is perſecution." *

Such an aſſertion is more eaſily made than proved; and nothing, ſurely, but the *ſpirit of party* could have excited a perſon of ſuch ſingular penetration and brilliant talents, as His Lordſhip undoubtedly poſſeſſes, to have made an obſervation which one moment's cool reflection muſt ſhow to be falſe and fallacious. That conſtitution which does not make uſe of every precaution, to guard and ſecure itſelf againſt the attacks of its enemies, muſt ſtand on a very precarious and rotten foundation.

As an impenetrable barrier againſt ſuch attempts, was that wiſe law enacted, called "The Teſt Act;" to ſecure and guard the State from the poſſibility of its being undermined, by the admiſſion of improper perſons to the exerciſing offices of truſt and importance. While the Teſt Law remains, the State is ſecure; — if ever that ſhould be repealed, the venerable fabric of our Conſtitution will fall into ruins, and a Democracy ariſe in its ſtead.

* Biſhop of Llandaff's Charge to his Clergy, June, 1791, page 11 and 12.

The

The Diſſenters complain, that there is no reaſon to ſuſpect danger from them — they are peaceable and innoxious; ſo is the tiger when confined in his den, when he has not the power to deſtroy. The Diſſenters, while the Teſt Act remains, cannot openly ſubvert the Government; and whilſt they are excluded from poſts of authority, they can only ſhow their teeth, but cannot bite.

The wiſdom of Parliament, in the year 1787, decided, that the Teſt Laws ſhould not be repealed. Mr. Beaufoy was on this occaſion the advocate for the repeal. Not baffled by this rebuff, the Diſſenters, two years after (1789) applied again to Parliament; and Mr. Beaufoy once more came forward as the champion of the party, aided by Mr. Fox. Again did they find their hopes chimerical; the majority of the Houſe voted againſt the repeal.

With determined obſtinacy, they ſtill perſiſted in their claims to have the Teſt Laws repealed.— It was upon this laſt occaſion, that Dr. Prieſtley addreſſed a moſt infamous invective to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which he threatened him with the evil conſequences of oppoſing this application.

It was in the year 1790 that the Diſſenters, muſtering up all their ſtrength, ſelected Mr. Fox to plead their cauſe in the ſenate. Theſe factious

demagogues could not have adopted a meaſure better calculated to defeat their cauſe. Every intelligent perſon eaſily perceived the hoſtile deſigns they had upon the Conſtitution; they ſaw that, to bring about their own ends, they would coaleſce with any man who eſpouſed their cauſe. That they had raiſed the higheſt expectations from this grand attack, is evident, by their inſolent behaviour, their extravagant boaſtings, their pompous declamations.

The important day at length arrived, which was to decide *the fate of this Kingdom!*—the 2d of March 1790 — a day ever to be remembered! Mr. Pitt, with his accuſtomed penetration, had previouſly moved for a Call of the Houſe; he reſolved that a queſtion of ſuch infinite moment ſhould not be canvaſſed but in a full Houſe. Mr. Fox, with ſpecious eloquence, ſaid every thing trite and common on the ſubject, agreeably to the inſtructions he had received from the Diſſenters. The motion was ſeconded by Sir Harry Houghton, *a conforming Preſbyterian.* Mr. Pitt replied to the arguments of Mr. Fox with a force of eloquence, and with ſuch copiouſneſs and ſolidity of argument, as moſt powerfully to impreſs the Houſe. A more animated, energetic, and comprehenſive ſpeech, was never delivered within the walls of St. Stephen's Chapel. He was followed by Mr. Burke, in a high ſtrain of eloquence. At three o'clock, the Houſe divided

vided on the queſtion, and a very great majority negatived the motion for the Repeal.

Thus were the Diſſenters once more completely defeated in their nefarious attempts " to blow up and undermine the Conſtitution." And may every attempt (if they ever ſhould have the madneſs to attempt) to remove the ancient bulwarks of the Conſtitution, tend only to cover them with diſgrace and confuſion.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

French Revolution.

DEAR SIR,

YOU will not wonder at the arrogant behaviour of the Diſſenters upon their laſt attempt to raiſe themſelves into power, when you reflect that the Revolution had broke out in France a year before. With an enthuſiaſm bordering upon frenzy did the Diſſenters view this event: it appeared to them as a foretaſte of what they wiſhed and hoped for in this country; it was like taking a peep from *Piſgah's Mount* at the promiſed land. As in the application for a Repeal of the Teſt Act, all the religious denominations had ſhaken hands, and were determined "to pull all together," to gain their point, ſo, when the French Revolution began, every Pulpit reſounded with Liberty. The Calviniſt and the Unitarian, the Anabaptiſt and the Methodiſt, all agreed in hailing this auſpicious event. The *Hierophant* of the party, the High-prieſt of ſedition, took the lead, and blew a blaſt not like John Knox,

againſt

againſt *the whole regiment of Women*, but againſt the whole regiment of Emperors, Kings, Potentates, Prelates, &c.

Dr. Price, or rather (as Mr. Burke has compared him to) *Hugh Peters Redvivus*, ſeized the opportunity of the celebration of the Anniverſary of the Revolution, to preach a political ſermon upon the Revolution in France, and blaſphemouſly adopted the "Nunc dimittis" of good old Simeon to the occaſion. In this diſcourſe the Revolution in France was ſpoken of with the higheſt and moſt rapturous applauſe; and gentle hints given of the expediency of ſuch an one at home.

As I have elſewhere ſhewn, * the Diſſenters ſeized every opportunity of fomenting diſaffection to Government: they ſupported Mr. Wilkes, they abetted the Americans, they joined (a great number of them) Lord G. Gordon in the year 1780, and, previous to the French Revolution, they had made uſe of the 4th of November, the Anniverſary of the Revolution, to preach inflammatory diſcourſes. Attend to the language of one of their preachers on this occaſion: "What are all the amazing Revo-
"lutions that have taken place in the Governments
"of this World, but the *ſpirited* and ſucceſsful exer-
"tions of men, who, when they ſaw their miſeries
"beyond remedy, declared them to be paſt endu-

* See Letter 2d.

" rance! What, but the vigorous and applauded " efforts of ſuch individuals and ſtates, to regain " the liberty in which God and Nature had made " them free!"* " The day has dawned, and the " day-ſtar has riſen in the hearts of all men; and in " that knowledge which pervades the world, we " have a *greater ſecurity* for the *liberty* and happi- " neſs of the world, than *ten thouſand Charters* or " *Acts of Parliament!*" †. In Dr. Price's diſcourſes " On the Love of our Country," you will find numerous paſſages of a more dangerous tendency.

The dying and expiring hopes of the Diſſenters revived with the eſtabliſhment of the National Aſſembly of France. Dr. Price was overwhelmed with the panegyrical addreſſes he received from that aſſembly and other Pariſian ſocieties. This rouſed the emulation of the ſceptical Prieſtley, who, after having been completely vanquiſhed in his Theological attacks upon the Doctrines of the Church of England, by thoſe able polemic writers, Dr. Horſley, the preſent Biſhop of Rocheſter, and the Rev. Mr. Burn, of Birmingham, began to enter the region of politics, by the publiſhing a ſeries of Letters to Mr. Burke on his celebrated work on the French Revolution. His ſubſequent conduct both in the Pulpit and out of it, became ſo daring, that, alarmed at

* Sermon preached at Peckham, Surrey, Nov. 2, 1788, by the Rev. R. Jones, p. 23.

† Ibid. p. 26.

the

the danger to which the Church and State was expoſed, by the conduct of this turbulent and haughty man, the inhabitants of Birmingham expelled him from their town, burnt and deſtroyed his meeting-houſe and dwelling-houſe in the memorable riots at that place.

To Dr. Prieſtley, his Coadjutors, and the Diſſenters at large, were the tumults owing; long had the common people endured the virulent harangues of the Diſſenting preachers at that place, againſt the eſtabliſhed Church, with uncommon patience; but, when the hand-bill appeared, juſtly ſuſpected to be the production of a Diſſenting preacher, * that kindled the rage of the incenſed multitude, and, while the Diſſenters were indelicately celebrating the Orgies of French Liberty, with uncontroulable licentiouſneſs, they began thoſe acts of violence, which, by the calm and intrepid conduct of the neighbouring Nobility and Clergy, were at length ſtopped. The primary author of this commotion, the diſturber of the peace of ſociety, abſconded, and ſought an aſylum with his Republican brethren in London and *Hackney*. With unparalleled aſſurance, he wiſhed to paſs himſelf to the world as a martyr for truth! while, inſtead of confeſſing the impropriety of his conduct, he vindicated it.—His conduct afterwards at Hackney is too well known to require recapitulation.

* See Mr. Dundas's Speech in the Houſe of Commons, May 21, 1792.

But,

But, I limit not myſelf to the conduct of Price and Prieſtley: it may be juſtly retorted, that the Diſſenters as a body, were not to be cenſured for the imprudent conduct of two of their teachers. I will take a wider range; I will prove to you, Sir, that the Diſſenters as a body, tacitly approved of the conduct of their leaders. If they had not, would they have tamely ſubmitted to the juſt reproaches with which they were ſcourged; did not their ſilence denote, if not their approbation, at leaſt, that they were not *diſpleaſed?* If they had been that loyal body of men, which they are ſometimes arrogant enough to ſtile themſelves, why did they not paſs a vote of cenſure upon Dr. Price and Dr. Prieſtley for their political conduct? Why did not they diſavow their principles? Theſe queries are eaſily replied to: becauſe, they ſecretly *approved of them.*—Secretly, did I ſay, they openly approved of them.

To prove this, I will give you the following facts:—That the Diſſenters, ſince the death of Price, and the exile of Prieſtley, have been more than ever the partiſans of French Democracy. Dr. Price lived not to ſee the death of Lewis XVI.; the elevation and infernal tyranny of Robeſpierre; Dr. Price lived not to ſee the nation of France avowing, in the face of all Europe, their diſbelief of the exiſtence of a God;—perhaps, had he lived to ſuch a period, he probably might have altered his ideas, on ſeeing "God's Salvation" exemplified

plified in the French nation. But the Diſſenters have uniformly ſtuck by the French, even when they were Atheiſts; even during the reign of Robeſpierre; they have joined in all the combinations of diſaffected men, to attempt a Revolution here; and their Meeting-houſes (with a very trifling exception) have been converted into *Aſſemblies of Sedition.* Think me not ſevere; I appeal to facts; facts, that muſt ſpeak home to every man's boſom.

As to calling the *King a fool* and a *blockhead*; refuſing to pray for him in their public worſhip; drinking ſucceſs to the French; adorning their parlours with portraits of Buonaparte, Tom Paine, Horn Tooke, and others; and, *perhaps*, a *little ivory Guillotine* in ſome ſly corner; I paſs over ſuch circumſtances as theſe; what I limit myſelf to, is their *plotting Treaſon.* That the Diſſenters were active Members of the London Correſponding Society, is an incontrovertible truth. Thomas Hardy, who was tried for Treaſon, and who was the leading man in the ſociety, *is a member* of a Diſſenting church, the *paſtor of which*, by his conduct, nearly eſcaped being placed in a ſimilar condition. The following anecdote, relating to this *pious and loyal* ſociety of Non Cons, is worthy your notice: Upon a Sunday previous to the laſt Faſt-day but one, a miniſter preached, (not the miniſter of the place) who afterwards gave notice, that ſervice would be performed

there on the Faſt-day. Though he himſelf was a Democrat, he had got among a ſtill more deſperate ſet; they thronged about him as he came from the pulpit, and demanded, "Who gave him authority "to mention about the obſervance of a Faſt-day; "they knew no King there but Jeſus." *Thelwall's Lectures* were principally attended by Diſſenters. Upon Hardy's trial a *Diſſenting Miniſter appeared* for his character.

Jeremiah Joyce, Chaplain to Earl Stanhope, was brought up at Hackney College, and was a Diſſenting Miniſter. On the very firſt Sunday after his acquittal at the Old Bailey, he preached at the moſt reſpectable meeting-houſe the Diſſenters have in the Metropolis, the Rev. Mr. Tayler's, Carter Lane, St. Paul's.

Can any perſon dare to ſay, that this was not flying in the face of Government moſt audaciouſly? Treaſon was not proved againſt Mr. Joyce, but enough was proved to ſhow he was a dangerous man, an enemy to Government; notwithſtanding, the Diſſenters cordially received him into their ſociety again, as a *Teacher*. Good God! if they had not been ſworn enemies to the Government, they never could have acted ſuch a part.

But

But again, you recollect Mr. Winterbotham (an aſſiſtant preacher at a Diſſenting Chapel in the country) being fully convicted of preaching ſedition? — He was ſentenced to be impriſoned in Newgate; but the moment he was releaſed, the Diſſenters in London *ſolicited him to preach among them:* and the firſt Sunday of his being at large, he actually preached to crowded audiences in Devonſhire-ſtreet, Biſhopſgate-ſtreet.

This is plain and indiſputable evidence of the Diſſenters' attachment to the Houſe of Hanover!— or rather, is it not proof *direct* of their attachment to the French Directory?

But, Sir, this is not all. Thomas Paine, the apoſtle of Anarchy, was a Diſſenter, and (I have heard) once an itinerant preacher. — The known predilection of the Diſſenters for the writings of this gentleman is evident, not only from the immenſe number of copies of "*The Rights of Man,*" bought and diſtributed by them, but alſo by the following circumſtance. When that treatiſe was in manuſcript, and the *policy* of publiſhing it was under diſcuſſion, leſt it ſhould not be circulated, numbers of Diſſenters wrote out copies of it; which were moſt induſtriouſly diſtributed, and copies taken from them: ſo that had it never appeared *in print*, it

would have had a rapid circulation in a clandeſtine and *private* manner.

To proceed. The moſt obnoxious writers againſt Government, and in behalf of the pretended rights of man, have been brought up by or elſe are now among the Diſſenters. Godwin, the author of Political Juſtice, was a Diſſenting Miniſter at Beaconsfield; Gilbert Wakefield is a Diſſenter; Frend, who was expelled the Univerſity of Cambridge, now aſſociates with Diſſenters; the Conductors of the Monthly Review are Diſſenters; the Conductors of the Analytical Review are Diſſenters; the chief Conductors of the Critical Review are Diſſenters!—Benjamin Flower, the printer and editor of a Cambridge Paper (well known for its oppoſition to Government) is a Diſſenter. And among thoſe perſons who have been convicted of high treaſon, as before alluded to, we ſhall find them altogether Diſſenters. Thomas Muir, Fyſche Palmer, Gerald, and Skirving, all Preſbyterians.

The Diſſenters are almoſt excluſively the purchaſers of the Jacobin Prints. *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Courier*, are chiefly ſupported by Diſſenters!

Do you, my dear Sir, wiſh for more irrefragable and inconteſtible proofs, that the Diſſenters are a body

body inimical to the State? Did I not think that I ſhould tire your patience, I could furniſh you with more inſtances; but, fully ſenſible of your coincidence in this ſentiment with myſelf, I ſhall only trouble you with another letter, reſpecting Ireland. In the interim,

I am, &c,

LETTER

LETTER V.

Conduct of the Diſſenters in Ireland.

Concluſion.

DEAR SIR,

WITH the moſt ſincere pleaſure do I congratulate you on the total defeat of the French, and the Rebels, in Ireland. And, Sir, if any additional proof was neceſſary, to prove the diſloyalty of the Diſſenters, a very melancholy one offers itſelf, in their moſt atrocious conduct in raiſing the ſtandard of rebellion, conjointly with the Roman Catholics.

Methinks I ſee you ſhrink back with horror! Not all the ghoſts and goblins, and Caſtle Spectres, our novel writers and dramatiſts have brought forward to view, could amaze you more than this wild, unnatural, and infernal coalition.

For men (that ſeceded from the Church of England becauſe it retained ſome of the ceremonies of the *Church of Rome*; men that would not join the eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed religion becauſe it was too nearly allied to *Antichriſt)* to give the fraternal embrace to prieſts and friers, to join in ſtrict union with *Antichriſt*, to overturn the Reformed Religion — " Be " aſtoniſhed, O ye heavens, and be horribly afraid " thou earth ! " for never, ſince God created the heavens and the earth, was there ſuch an unnatural combination formed !!!

Shades of Knox, Cartwright, Sampſon, Robinſon, Owen, Goodwin — will ye not re-viſit ſuch a generation, and upbraid them with their conduct ! But words are inadequate to expreſs my abhorrence of the conduct of theſe men.

While they exclaimed againſt the Liturgy, and the veſtments, habits, and ceremonies, of the Church of England, I viewed them as honeſt men ; and I applauded their ſincerity.—But, when I ſee them give the right hand of fellowſhip to the Church of Rome, merely to aſſiſt in pulling down the Reformed Church, I view them as the baſeſt villains. Such has, for ſome time, been the policy of the Diſſenters ; they have joined the Roman Catholics in contending for a repeal of the penal laws.

I lately read a ſermon, by Mr. Kenrick of Exeter, in which, after giving the eſſence of Fox's Martyrology, he concludes by ſaying, that the Roman Ca-

tholics of the preſent day are the moſt inoffenſive, humbleſt, ſet of beings exiſting; and from them he makes a ſkip to the Diſſenters, whom he argues, ought to be admitted to the firſt places under Government.

The late proceedings in Ireland will furniſh you with ſufficient inſtances of the Preſbyterians being the chief agents in that wretched rebellion, which has cauſed ſo much blood and ſlaughter. Among the traitors tried and executed, Roman Catholic prieſts and Diſſenting Clergyman cut a moſt conſpicuous figure.

May theſe open, recent, inſtances of the treachery of Proteſtant Diſſenters, have their due effect upon every friend of the eſtabliſhed religion; may it open their eyes to ſee the danger to be juſtly apprehended from men who, under pretence of ſeceding from the Church *becauſe it had too great a ſimilitude to Popery*, will join with Papiſts, nay with *Deiſts* and *Atheiſts*, to overthrow it.

I hope, Sir, that you will acquit me of a want of candour, in what has been ſtated in theſe letters; if I have erred, it is in favour of that ſect among whom I firſt drew my breath; but from whom, from motives of the pureſt integrity, I have now ſeparated.

There

There are individuals among them, even among their Teachers, whom I reſpect and revere; whoſe loyalty I would myſelf vouch for, and even be ſecurity: but that number is very ſmall indeed — it reminds me of Dean Swift and his dearly beloved Roger. As a body, I view them as enemies of our moſt excellent Conſtitution; I view them as intolerant as Roman Catholics; I view them as bigotted as any votaries of the Roman Church: and in their circle of miniſters, there is many a Gardiner, many a Bonner, many a Whitgift, and many a Laud who, though not honoured with a mitre or decorated with lawn ſleeves, exerciſe a dominion and ſupremacy more than Epiſcopal or Archiepiſcopal.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

POSTCRIPT.

IN addition to what I have ſtated, I cannot help adverting to the conduct of the Diſſenters, as to the *Voluntary Contributions*. To their eternal diſgrace be it ſaid, that at a criſis the moſt important the annals of this country afford; when threatened with an

Invaſion, though called upon by the chief magiſtrate of the city (though circular letters were ſent to their *Miniſters* to exhort them to contribute) neither *Miniſters* nor *People* ſtirred one ſtep in the buſineſs; but treated the Letters and the Contributions with the moſt ſovereign contempt. Will they, after this conduct, dare to ſtyle themſelves "loyal ſubjects?" Oh ſhame, where is thy bluſh!

BRITISH MUSEUM

FINIS.